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VENEMAN ANNOUNCES GRANT TO HELP PROTECT TREE SEEDLINGS IN CALIFORNIA

Grant will Protect 2 Million Tree Seedlings and 36,000 Pounds of Seeds

WASHINGTON, Dec. 24, 2004---Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman today announced that the U.S. Department of Agriculture has made a grant to the state of California to maintain a vital supply of tree seedlings and a unique seed bank, to ensure reforestation after such events as the recent southern California wildfires.

“This \$150,000 grant will fund the maintenance of more than two million tree seedlings in Magalia, Calif., and 36,000 pounds of seeds in Davis, Calif., for another year,” said Veneman. “We look forward to working with California Governor Schwarzenegger on this and future projects that will benefit the residents of the state.”

“I am very pleased that we have the opportunity to make this grant, as we improve California's environment while strengthening our relationship with the state,” said Pacific Southwest Regional Forester Jack Blackwell. “This grant will help protect this important resource.”

The native pine, fir and oak seedlings in Magalia would have been lost due to funding shortfalls, and the future of a seed bank representing California's conifer diversity was also in question before today's USDA announcement. The seedlings and seeds, which are matched to specific areas and elevations of the state, are the only realistic option for quickly replanting large areas devastated by fires, insect infestations and mudslides.

“This rapid response by USDA and the U.S. Forest Service to provide this grant for the state of California's seed bank for tree seedlings to replant forests is a valuable start to our new partnership during this holiday season,” said California Secretary for Resources Mike Chrisman.

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